(Continued from Preceding Page)

been a mere niece of the house, and no more-I believe that he really would have stopped me go-But I counted for rather more

My father had been an elder brother of Uncle Ralph, and the p'ace, such as it was-it was of no great size or value-together with the title, the baronetcy, had been his. My mother had died when I was quite young, and I was their only child. The consequence was that when I left school and came to live at home, at Scotney House, my father began by degrees to let more and more of the direction of the household affairs slip into my

Of course, he always said what was to be done, if any question arose, but he liked me to see to

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the running of all the ordinary machinery of our domestic life, and if any point came up for decision on which I did not suppose that he would take particular interest, I would more often than not settle it without troubling him about it. So in some ways, young though I was, my position came to be some-thing not unlike that of the mistress of the home, and I always gave the orders about dinner and so on and the rooms that visiting guests were to occupy and the like.

Then the greatest sorrow of my life came, when I was not yet quite twenty-one-for I had been too young when my mother died to feel her loss in any real and enduring sense. But my father and I had been rather like elder brother and sister, I think, to each other, than the ordinary relation between father and daughter, or perhaps I may say that there was between us all that was most dear in both relationships.

And then, coming in from hunting on a cold, wet, miserable day, he had sat down before the library fire and gone fast asleep. He awoke feeling chilled and wretched; the next morning he had a fearful cold, which grew worse as the day went on. In the evening he was in bed with a high temperature and in less than a fortnight, after three days' fight with death, his heart gave out, and I was left one of the most unhappy beings in the world.

Uncle Ralph was a major in a Highland regiment, though it was on his mother's side only that he was a Scot, when my father's death made him a baronet and the owner of our not very opulent or extensive acres. He had been looking forward to the command of the regiment, and would far rather have remained a soldier than have returned home to take possession of his patrimony, but he realized that he owed a duty to the place and to the tenants.

Of course, I had been quite uncertain what was to become of me, whether I should be given orders to quit, or what would happen, until Uncle Ralph, in the kindest way in the world, implored me to stay on with him, directing the house as I had done for my father.

I was only too thankful to accept, both because my love of Scotney itself and of Uncle Ralph, and also because it was not very obvious that there was anywhere else for me to go. And, really, I exercised rather more authority under my uncle's reign than under my father's, because the former came into his kingdom and I was already queening it there.

But, of course, I had every expectation that my queenship would be at an end as soon as ever Uncle Ralph surprised us all by coming home from a hunting trip in Cash-mere with a young bride whom he had picked up at Simla. Somehow none of us had ever expected that Uncle Ralph would marry, although it was so obviously the right thing for him to do-just as the obviously right thing for me to have done would have been to be born a boy. The house of Carlton needed heirs.

But Uncle Ralph had always been so shy with girls-we all had chaffed him about it often-that we could not imagine his plucking up courage to propose to anyone. Perhaps, after all, that was not exactly the way in which it did happen in the end; but, however it was done, about two or three years before that dreadful night he had arrived with his young bride, a blonde and most beautiful creature. It was no wonder that Uncle

Ralph had been fascinated. And then, of course, I prepared, with the best grace I might, to lay the reins definitely down, but to my surprise, so soon as I made a move to do so my new Aunt Enid, as I had to call this girl who was certainly by years younger than I and by looks many years younger, begged that things might be allowed to go on just as they had before. She had no idea how to manage a house; indeed, it would bore her immensely to have to do so, and Ralph told her that I was such a wonderful manager—so on and so forth.

The end was that, as before, I consented to remain. Of course, it would not be quite the same. In a measure it was a little as if I were the queen dowager and she the reigning sovereign.

CHAPTER III.

The Corpse in the Summer-House. TT only shows how immensely quickly our minds work that I should have been able to think of all this, and indeed of a great deal more detail incidental to it, in the very short time that it took

me to reach the Summer-house. The door, facing me, stood open as I went up the short side paths toward it, and even as I turned into this little by-path I could see a curious yellow gleam within the Summer-house itself struggling with the pure silvery ray of the moon which flooded everything. A change in the direction of the gleam enabled me to understand its meaning; it came from the bull's-eye lantern which the keeper always had with him when he went his rounds in the coverts. But now,

as I saw, my uncle held it. Already I had become dreadfully aware of the semblance of a bluedraped figure lying on the Summerhouse floor, of my uncle kneeling at one side of it, while on the other must be Livesay. This I made out, confusedly, and then the retriever came from the door, at first with a stiffening of its back and a growl, but then with a tail-wagging greeting as it recognized me for a friend.

And with that I reached the door and, looking in, seemed to know the worst at a glance.

On the floor of the Summer-

house lay the form of my young aunt, motioniess, her face absolutely pallid-pallid with even an exaggerated deathly whiteness given to it by those strange and contrasting lights. Even so there was enough, lying as she did, to suggest all the elements of a tragedy, but plainer evidence stared up at us from the recumbent body in an irregular patch of crimson staining the bodice of the dress around and below the left breast.

I had a stifling feeling as if my heart had leaped up to my throat and was beating there so as to impede my speaking. It was with a great effort that I gasped out the entirely foolish question, "Good heavens, Uncle Ralph, what is it?

What has happened?" Small need indeed to ask what had happened, with that awful evidence of the fact lying there before us-that crimson witness. As for the further question, the how of its happening, that was a problem crying insistently for solution, destined to occupy us for many a day to come.

I had said the foolish words befor the ray of the bull's-eye lantern, turned full in my face as I stood in the open doorway, blinded me for a moment. I think Livesay had made a movement as if to stand between me and the poor body-as if there was any additional horror still left for me to know!-but then perhaps he realized the futility of it, and did nothing. My uncle turned the lamp back as before and let its ray fall across the figure and reveal what it would.

Uncle Ralph did not try to answer my question Probably he knew that it meant nothing, came out almost unawares, and that I should not really expect it answered. All he said was, "You there, Netty?"

My coming did not seem to surprise him at all. He was much accustomed to having me at his elbow, to talk to about affairs of the house and estate.

"I came to tell you, uncle." I said. in a voice which I was grateful to find had regained its steadiness, "that Aunt Enid was not in her room, that her bed had not been slept in."

"No," he said absently, and scarcely looking at me.

The silence, as neither of the men spoke, grew almost intolerable, and it seemed as if the dog felt it, too, for just at the moment when it seemed to me as if I must cry out, to break the tension, a cold wet nose, seeking comfort and sympathy, was thrust into my hand. .I am not sure that it did not help to steady me more than any human touch could have done. "Oh, Uncle Ralph," I said, "are

you sure—is, it certain—is she quite"— "Yes," he said hopelessly. "Quite! Look at her."

I had seen death before, but it was the decent, ordered death of a bedroom, not a violent tragedy of the open night. But my nerves were growing steadier each instant and I looked, as he bade me, long

She lay quite peacefully, almost as it might be one sleeping, on her back, with her face upward to the light. The small, perfect features had never looked more faultless. the slightly peevish expression which rather spoilt the almost too tiny mouth had gone; the golden hair lying in very little disorder made a beautiful frame for the marble-white face.

It was evident that she had not come out in response to any sudden, unexpected sin.mons. Even in life the excessive neatness and daintiness of her dress had almost seemed to convey a tacit reproach to me, who only, with the greatest effort, could be at the trouble to take decent care in regard to such matters. But now, in death, the delicacy of the flue lace edging about the ner and corsage of the clinging blue tea-gown and the attention that she had evidently given to every detail of her toilette made a curious contrast and almost a mute protest against the disorderly attire of Uncle Ralph and myself.

Probably a man would not have felt aware of it, but to a woman, whose education, I suppose, makes her more attentive to such things, the incongruity and horror of the whole scene was intensified by this daintiness. There was just the one evidence, such terrible evidence, that she was not resting there quietly asleep-the stain of outrageous crimson, which my startled eyes beheld, against the bosom of her dress.

'You found her so-like this?" I asked the keeper, who did not answer audibly, but nodded his

head in assent. My question to the man seemed to rouse my uncle out of the fixed brooding into which he had fallen. 'We had better take her up," he said, in a strained, hoarse voice. "If you will help me, Livesay, we

will take her to her room.' I know that there was forming in my sadly strained mind a dim idea that there was something not quite right about the proposal even before Livesay put it clearly into words for me by suggesting, "Beg pardon, Sir Ralph, but wouldn't it be right that the doctor and perhaps the police should see—her

"Yes, Livesay, yes, of course, you are right," my uncle agreed, passing his hand across his brow as if he would rub away some confusion of the brain. "Yes, the best way would be if you would go for Dr. Pratt. Ask him to come here, to the Summer-house-he will know his way-at once, and then go on to Larncombe (Larncombe was the village constable) and tell him." "Yes, Sir Ralph," the man said, in the hushed voice of reverence which he had used throughout.
"I'll leave the lastern in case—in case you should want it," he ended, feebly, as if realizing how very remote was any possibility that it would be much needed.

My uncle did not say him yea or nay, so the man set down the lantern on the small fron-legged table and went out, followed by his dog, leaving us two watchers of the

CHAPTER IV. My Aunt Enid.

MUST new say a few words about this Summer-house which was the scene of our awful vigil. I suppose it stood at a distance of some three hundred yards or so from the house.

It was approached by a gravelled footpath leading away from the sweep of the drive before the house, and after passing the Summer-house this path led on, still among shrubs and beneath thick trees, till it came out on the main road at the entrance of Upper Scotney village. This was indeed the nearest way from the village to the house, and was used habitually by those going on foot from one to the other.

About halfway between the Summer-house and the main house the path branched, and one branch, so to call it, though it really went on almost in a straight line, led to the back regions, the servants' part And besides these two, which may be regarded as the main paths, there was yet another branchlet leading to another entrance to the house through a conservatory which it had been a whim of my Aunt Enid to have built.

Of beauty of form or harmony she had no idea at all, but the bright colors of flowers appealed to her, rather as they might to s child. The conservatory opened out of her boudoir and so to this path, which was little more than a track, leading through the trees until it joined the gravelled way.

I thought, as I sat in silence, with my uncle, of the many hours of contemplative peace which I had passed in this Summer-house, and of the utter impossibility that I could ever again come into the place with the like peace of mind. That dread object, still so beautiful, though so dreadful, which had been my young aunt, lay there, even more stlent than its watchers.

I was silent, though I had quesdesired to ask, because I knew Uncle Ralph's moods well enough to be very sure that he had no inclination to have questions put to him now. He never was a talker.

Now, in the face of this fearful tragedy, he seemed as if he were benumbed. He had drawn up his chair and sat as close as might be to the white, crimson-stained form lying on the bare, boarded floor.

(Continued on Next Page)





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